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Folsom Field Office

BLM

The Cronan Ranch

Draft Management Plan And Environmental Analysis

Bureau of Land Management
Folsom Field Office
July, 2006

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United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Folsom Field Office
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Folsom, California 95630
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AUG 10 2006

Dear Friend:

The draft Cronan Ranch Management Plan and Environmental Assessment are ready for your review. The two documents were combined into one to make them easier to read.

The Cronan Ranch, a beautiful, 1,400-acre tract situated between the South Fork American River and State Highway 49, was acquired in 2005 by the Bureau of Land Management's Folsom Field Office, and opened to public recreational use. This brought the BLM's public land holdings along the South Fork to about 5,500 acres, scattered along the 21-mile stretch of river between Chili Bar and Salmon Falls Bridge.

It took nine public meetings and one field trip over a five month period to produce the draft plan. Most of what is contained in the draft is the result of consensus by participants in the public planning meetings. Where participants couldn't agree on how to resolve an issue, the BLM went ahead and made the necessary decisions.

Our hope is that you will read through both documents, then give us your ideas on how the plan might be improved, along with your reasoning behind the ideas. The 30-day review period will end September 20, 2006.

There will be an informal, open house-style workshop on Saturday, August 26, at Sutter's Mill School, 4801 Luneman Road, in Lotus where you can speak with a BLM staff member to present your opinions and suggestions. The staff will be available all day long, from 10:00 am until 3:00 pm, to hear and record your comments. No appointments will be necessary – just stop by.

Sincerely,

James M. Eicher
Project Manager

Cronan Ranch

A Draft Management Plan

Description of the Area

The 1400-acre Cronan Ranch parcel is located along the South Fork of the American River in El Dorado County. It contains varied terrain which ranges from relatively flat to quite steep. Vegetation includes blue oak savannah, foothill woodland, and riparian areas. There are 12 miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, fishing, bird watching, and other recreation activities. There is a significant population of noxious weeds, especially yellow-star thistle and medusa head. Beaches along the river have long been used by rafters as a lunch spot, with some picnic-related facilities. The land owners allowed hunting access to club members. The property has been the location for several Hollywood productions. A portion of the property, about 60 acres, will be managed by the County.

The parcel borders on State Highway 49 and the South Fork American River, and lies between the Greenwood Creek and Norton Ravine parcels.

Present Management Situation

Prior to acquisition by the BLM, the Cronan Ranch parcel was used since the 1890s for livestock grazing. Following acquisition, the Cronan Ranch became subject to the *South Fork American River Management Plan*, adopted in 2004 (SFARMP), and by stipulations and restrictions posed by the seller (ARC) and accepted by the purchaser (BLM). The SFAMP stipulated that newly-acquired parcels would automatically become part of the South Fork American River Special Management Area, subject to management guidelines and planning decisions associated with the nearest, or most similar, Special Management Area parcel of public land, whichever is most appropriate. For the Cronan Ranch, this would be the Greenwood Creek parcel. The SFARMP also stipulated that new parcels would be closed to mineral entry or location under the General Mining laws for a period of 50 years, except in cases of national emergency.

These interim management guidelines will remain in effect until a specific management plan, developed in cooperation with the interested public through the community-based planning process, is officially adopted by the BLM.

Purpose and Intent

The purpose of the Cronan Ranch Management Plan is to provide specific guidance for the use and maintenance of the resource values contained in the property. It is the intention of the BLM to ultimately incorporate this plan into the SFARMP.

Vision Statement

The Cronan Ranch will be managed to preserve open space for public use and to restore and enhance plant and wildlife habitats. Reasonable public access to the river and the land will accommodate a wide range of uses including but not limited to recreational and educational experiences that are consistent with resource protection. Public land management will respect and protect private property rights, and balance competing uses. Education will be an important aspect of public land management. Cultural resources, including both prehistoric and historic, will be protected and enhanced. The Cronan Ranch will be managed in a fashion that recognizes human needs through a partnership with the BLM, El Dorado County, the community, and other relevant agencies.

Management Actions

Items and issues not covered in this plan will be guided by the SFARMP, the Sierra MFP, and by general BLM policies as appropriate.

Bio-diversity

Biodiversity is defined as the full variety of life and its associated patterns and processes. It includes the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences between them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur. From a practical perspective, in general, the more diverse an ecosystem is, the more stable it is. For the South Fork American, this means that a mosaic of all habitat types common to the area and typical of this elevation in the Western Sierra Nevada will be encouraged and maintained. This will include a variety of plant communities in different stages of succession.

1. Develop vegetative management plan for the Cronan Ranch.
2. Encourage shade areas with native trees, such as oaks, pines, and willows. Balance management for the different species of plants and animals with consideration for various stages of succession. Do not favor one over the other. Emphasize and encourage ecotones.
3. Maintain and manage for scenic vistas.

Riparian Communities

Riparian, or streamside, plant communities are ecologically very important. They are productive for wildlife, and help prevent erosion. All identified riparian communities will be managed to maintain, or enhance as necessary, water quality and biological productivity. This will include perennial and intermittent streams as well as other wetlands. Riparian communities associated with artificial ponds on public lands will also be maintained.

Threatened or Endangered Species

By law, all plants or animals identified as Threatened or Endangered by the Federal Government, or as Rare or Endangered by the State of California, will be given special preference for

protection and management. Species which are candidates for listing by either the Federal or State governments will also be given special attention.

Noxious Weed Control

It is the policy of the BLM to eradicate populations of noxious weeds. Each parcel along the South Fork American River shall have a Noxious Weed Control Plan to expedite this policy. The principle weeds along the South Fork include scotch broom, medusa head, and star thistle. Consider all methods of weed abatement.

1. Priority will be given to keeping trails open and usable.
2. Remove star thistle and poison oak five feet on each side of trails where practical.

Oak Woodlands

Oaks are very important for influencing vegetation growth patterns and for wildlife. It is the policy of the BLM to encourage, expand, and maintain oak woodlands.

Vehicle Access and Use

1. Vehicle access to the Cronan Ranch by recreational visitors shall normally be confined to the parking lot.
2. The Cronan Ranch is closed to the private, unauthorized use of motorized vehicles outside the parking lot.
3. Persons who are exempt from these rules include: Federal, State, or local officers or employees in the scope of their duties; and members of any organized rescue or fire-fighting force in performance of an official duty; and persons, as specified in other sections of this plan, who have obtained proper authorization from the BLM.

Commercial Permits

1. Commercial permits will be issued on an annual basis. The BLM shall set a daily use capacity for commercial activity, and, if necessary, will adjust levels of commercial use to reduce environmental impacts. Adjustments will be made, based on monitoring, using adaptive management.
2. The number of commercial permits and users shall be adequate to meet public demand without adverse social and environmental impacts. If necessary, the BLM will reduce the number of permits by not allowing companies to transfer their use of the property when their companies are sold to another party.
3. The BLM will monitor commercial use and adjust the number of permits and/or use as needed, based on monitoring and carrying capacity thresholds.
4. Commercial outfitter sites shall be grouped together in the Permittee Zone. No existing commercial outfitter will be assigned a permanent camp location. Camp location

will be rotated on an annual basis. Shade structures will be allowed for food preparation. Picnic tables will be allowed, but will be phased out within five years. All structures will be removed by October 1 each year for the next five years.

5. Portable toilet facilities shall be phased out and replaced with permanent facilities.
6. From July First until Labor Day, commercial outfitters must have six or more boats on the river to qualify for using support vehicles for lunching purposes.
7. Commercial kayakers will be allowed to take-out, but not put-in on the Cronan Ranch.
8. On a case-by-case basis, the BLM may authorize a put-in/take-out request by a permitted outfitter. Decisions will be consistent with overall vision of the property.

Special events/competitive events/organized groups

1. On a case-by-case basis, and consistent with the overall vision statement, the BLM may issue Special Use Permits for one-time special events, competitive events, or organized group use of the Cronan Ranch.

Film Permit Proposals

1. Film permit proposals will be made on a case-by-case basis consistent with the overall vision of the property.
2. Monitor all commercial filming activities closely.
3. Pre-prepare a standard Environmental Analysis for commercial filming at the Cronan Ranch that identifies appropriate sites, areas where filming is inappropriate, and mitigation measures.
4. Work with local film commission to help implement a professional film permitting program in conjunction with local government and integrate environmental review into the planning process

Recreational Gold Dredging

1. Recreational Dredging Permits will be allowed on a case-by-case basis consistent with the guidelines contained in the SFA Management Plan (2004), with the overall vision of the property, and with the current stipulations of BLM dredging permits.
2. Recreational dredging may be allowed in the public use zones along the river, but not in the Permittee Zone used by commercial operators.
3. Permits shall be for a two-week period at a specific site, with no more than two dredges operating at the same time on the Cronan Ranch.
4. Vehicle access for dredgers will be limited – one time in; one time out.

Visual Resource Management

1. Manage all lands in the Cronan Ranch parcel as VRM Class II

Camping

1. Organized group camping will require a Special Recreation Use Permit.
2. Camping for commercial outfitters will remain unchanged from present. Outfitters must notify BLM for overnight use. Commercial operators may use vehicular access to support camping activities.
3. Allow general public camping with Special Use Permits
4. Locate camping zones in fire-safe areas.
5. The BLM will identify additional fire-safe areas for camping.
6. Locate seasonal campsites for use when fire danger is minimal.
7. Campsites will be accessible only by non-motorized transportation.

Campfires

1. Campfires are allowed only in BLM- provided fire-rings located within designated campsites, or in camping zones.

Cultural Resources

1. Where practical, cultural sites will be interpreted for public use and enjoyment with an emphasis on interpreting sites associated with the Gold Rush of 1849, on the Cronan Ranch
2. Decision on retaining cultural resources does not preclude the removal of extraneous barbed wire.

Rights of Way

1. The same rules for rights-of-way stated in the SFA Management Plan shall also apply to the Cronan Ranch.

Trails

1. The trails on the Cronan Ranch will be multi-use trails maintained to a minimum of five feet in width where possible. The long term goal of a trail system from Greenwood Creek to Salmon Falls will continue to be vigorously pursued. Trails from private property on to the Cronan Ranch will be handled on a case by case basis. The trails will be open all year; a trail monitoring plan will be developed to insure the integrity of the system is maintained. Temporary closures of certain trails may be necessary from time to time to prevent resource damage and overuse.

2. Encourage trail design consistent with accepted Best Management Practices (BMP) and professional design.
3. Maintenance of existing trails is higher priority than designing and constructing new trails. Expand trail system where possible or desirable with BMP.
4. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, bicyclists and equestrians will be asked to stay on the trails at all times.

Facilities

1. Develop non-potable water source at the trailhead with hose bib.
2. Develop or designate helicopter Landing Zone.
3. Provide picnic facilities at staging area
4. Provide permanent restroom facilities at the parking lot, and locations near the public beach sites.

Recreational Use of Firearms

1. Target shooting is prohibited on the Cronan Ranch.

Hunting

1. Hunting is restricted to deer, turkey in the fall season, quail, and mourning doves. There will be no hunting for bear, squirrels, rabbits, jackrabbits, waterfowl, furbearers, or non-game species. Information on hunting seasons will be posted on the information kiosk in the staging area of the parking lot.
2. Hunters will sign in at the kiosk to inform other users they are hunting that particular day.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COVER SHEET

EA Roster Number: CA-180-06-26

TYPE OF EA

Application(s) (Non-BLM)

Standard MAD

BLM Proposal

Programmatic

Type of Application(s) or Proposals (s): Management Plan

Assessment Title: Cronan Ranch Management Plan

Name of Applicant(s): Folsom Field Office

Legal Description: T11N, R9E, Sections 9, 16, MDB&M

County: El Dorado County

Planning Unit and Management Area: Sierra Planning Area Management Framework Plan Amendment (MFP)

Prepared By: Folsom Field Office

Cronan Ranch Management Plan

Environmental Assessment

NEPA Document CA-180-06-26

Background and Need for Action

All federal lands under the jurisdiction of the BLM require a management plan. This plan will clearly state how a particular tract will be managed, and will always be available to the public.

In 2004, after a long process, the Folsom Field Office finalized and officially adopted a management plan for 4,164 acres of public land along the South Fork American River. This plan, developed through a series of public meetings using the community-based planning process, foresaw future acquisitions of land by the federal government within the South Fork planning area.

The plan stipulated that newly-acquired lands would immediately be subject to the existing plan, and managed in a manner similar to the closest existing parcel of public land until such time as the BLM could develop a specific plan for the parcel, again, using the community-based planning process. This is exactly what happened.

In 2005, the Folsom Field Office received title to the Cronan Ranch property from the American River Conservancy (ARC), a private, non-profit organization. The funds used by the ARC to purchase the property from the private owners, the Bacchi family of Coloma, came largely from both public and private donations. In another series of public meetings, in the Lotus area, participating private citizens worked with BLM staff to produce a draft management plan for the Cronan Ranch. Many of the participants were veterans of the earlier planning process.

The Cronan Ranch plan is the product of that process.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to adopt the draft *Cronan Ranch Management Plan*, as developed through a community-based planning effort and modified by staff review, and include it as an integrated amendment to the *South Fork American River Management Plan*, approved in 2004 (SFARMP).

The draft plan consists of actions needed to manage recently acquired BLM-administered lands along the South Fork American River in El Dorado County. This new parcel also contains special resource values which need increased levels of management and

protection not presently authorized or supported by existing plans. This proposal reflects management decisions, resource allocations, and planning designations developed in the community-based planning process for the Cronan Ranch. The planning decisions address emerging issues associated with the newly acquired lands. The Proposed Action is described in detail in the draft *Cronan Ranch Management Plan*.

Conformance with Planning

The proposed action is subject to the Sierra Planning Area Management Framework Plan (MFP) as amended on July 15, 1988. The MFP was reviewed, and it was determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the MFP as required by 43 CFR 1610.5 and 43 CFR 2300. The objective of the 1988 plan amendment was to augment land tenure decisions of the original 1983 MFP. The Amendment called for improving public land ownership patterns by allowing land tenure adjustments (land disposal and acquisitions) which are compatible with management goals such as acquiring land within river corridors.

The *South Fork American River Management Plan*, adopted in 2004 (SFARMP), states that if property is acquired by the BLM within the South Fork American planning area, it will come under the jurisdiction of the *Plan*. Specifically, it required a newly-acquired parcel to be managed in a manner similar to the closest parcel already covered in the *Plan*. For the Cronan Ranch, this would be the Greenwood Creek parcel.

The proposed action was designed to be consistent with the *South Fork American River Management Plan* (adopted in 2004), and with the Bureau's policy to protect and manage exceptional environmental and recreational values.

The Folsom Field Office will soon replace the Sierra MFP with a new, updated Resources Management Plan (RMP). Work on the RMP is currently underway, with completion scheduled for 2007. The SFARMP will be integrated as a complete package into the RMP.

Items and issues not covered in the plan will be guided by the SFARMP, the Sierra MFP, and by general BLM policies as appropriate.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

A. No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the Cronan Ranch would continue to be managed under the guidelines established for the closest parcel of BLM-administered public lands along the South Fork American River, as specified in the *South Fork American River Management Plan*, and under conditions of purchase, as specified by the seller, the American River Conservancy. This provides little or no specific activity level guidance, and does not take into consideration unique conditions, features, and public uses of the newly acquired

lands. Present levels of management would continue, no new developments would be provided or allowed, and access would remain at current levels and condition.

B. Unmodified Community-Based Plan Proposal Alternative

This alternative consists only of items and issues discussed and agreed to by the community-based planning group in a public forum, with no additions or modifications by BLM staff. The results of the community-based planning process, while impressive, were not complete. Several issues and other planning items were not addressed by the group because of time constraints. Also, several issues were discussed by the public, but not adopted by consensus for inclusion in the draft plan.

Because this alternative consists almost entirely of elements included in the proposed action, it was not analyzed.

Affected Environment

The South Fork American River drains an 804-square mile watershed in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Elevations range from 490 feet above sea level at Folsom Lake to about 10,000 feet along the crest of the Sierra. Nearly all the watershed is located within the Eldorado National Forest.

The planning area itself is at lower elevations, mostly less than 2,000 feet above sea level, in the western Sierra Nevada foothills. This is a rugged area covered with grasses, oak, pine, and chaparral grading to oak and conifer forests bisected by deep canyons cut by the South Fork and other year-round streams.

Socio-Economic Factors

The Cronan Ranch is located in rural El Dorado County along Highway 49 between Lotus and Auburn. Although population information for the vicinity of the Cronan Ranch is lacking, there are a number of private residences in the area, along with recreation-oriented businesses. A dozen or more commercial whitewater rafting companies have been using the Cronan Ranch beach area for a lunch stop. More than 20,000 users visited the site last year.

The Cronan Ranch has been used as a location for several motion pictures. Several buildings have been constructed as movie sets.

Topography

Topography is varied, ranging from quite steep in places to relatively flat.

Climate

Along with most of California, the Cronan Ranch has a Mediterranean-type climate,

consisting of hot, dry summers, and cool, wet winters.

At Folsom Dam, average rainfall ranges from 32.5 inches per year, while at Placerville, only 14 miles away, average rainfall ranges around 53.6 inches per year.

Air Quality

Since the Cronan Ranch is away from the heavily-populated Central Valley and its smog. Air quality is relatively good. Occasionally, smoke from wildfires causes problems.

Geology

The South Fork is located in the Western Metamorphic Belt of the Sierra Nevada physiographic province, which consists of steeply dipping metasedimentary and metavolcanic rocks of Paleozoic and Mesozoic age.

Soils

Most of the parent materials for the residual soils on the parcels along the South Fork American, are either common granitic, metasedimentary, or metavolcanic rock types, common in the Sierra Nevada foothills. In the canyon bottoms, and riparian areas especially, are sediments of mixed origin. In this area there are few rare species associated with these common substrates.

Hydrology

The South Fork American River is a major waterway in El Dorado County, flowing from the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains down the western slope where it joins the North Fork of the American River in Folsom Lake. The lower American River then travels down to the Sacramento Valley and into the Sacramento River near downtown Sacramento. The Sacramento River then flows into the San Francisco Bay.

The importance of water quality is evident in the American River Watershed. El Dorado County relies on the river's water for agricultural and municipal purposes as does the metropolitan area of Sacramento. The South Fork American River is the most popular river for commercial white water rafting in the Western United States. Annually, between 100,000 to 150,000 visitors float the river on either privately-owned boats, or through the services of commercial outfitters. The main water source in the project area is the South Fork American which has been greatly altered since the 1850's, and has not had a natural unimpaired flow since before the Gold Rush. Water impoundments managed by PG&E, SMUD, and EID all effect the natural flow of the river. Water quality in the project area appears to be influenced by a wide variety of factors relating to man's influence on the environment. A major source of water quality degradation is related to the coliform (fecal) group of bacteria. This may relate to animal waste, defective septic tank leach fields, and other undocumented sources. The primary sources of contamination appear to be located upstream of the planning area, according to the County River Management

Plan.

Vegetation

Approximately 57% of the Cronan Ranch is dominated by annual grasses, 38% mixed oak and conifer woodland, 4% riparian (streamside vegetation) and 1% mixed chaparral.

The far northwest corner of the Cronan Ranch, on east facing slopes above the parking lot, is where native herbaceous perennials are well established among the multiple canopies of shrubs, oaks and conifers. Significant native diversity is found along the ridge and west facing slopes of the lower West Ridge Trail. A forty acre parcel at the far southwest corner of the ranch (roughly triangular shaped) and immediately upslope of the American River, was acquired by the Bacchi family in the year 2000 from the Vicini family. These forty acres had previously been fenced off to cattle, allowing native oaks and woody shrubs to establish themselves, the shade of which substantially reduced grasses and other forage favored by cattle. These forty acres contain significant populations of purple needlegrass (*Nasella pulchra*).

South facing hill slopes north of the American River are dominated by interior live oak, with black oak, California buckeye, toyon, buckbrush, white leaf manzanita, keckiella, California coffeeberry, poison oak and pipe vine.

The riparian area along the South Fork American River is broad and diverse. Among the prominent species are sand bar willow, arroyo willow, shining willow, valley oak, Oregon ash, white alder, Fremont cottonwood, button willow, coyote brush, mock orange, California wild grape, deer grass and scotch broom.

Grasslands are composed largely of non-native annual species. Especially in the grassland area, noxious weeds are becoming dominant in patches that are increasing in size, displacing both native species, and other less objectionable non-native species. The grassland associated species of the most concern are yellow star thistle, Medusa head (an annual grass) and rush skeleton weed (a perennial with green stems and few leaves). Scotch broom, which occurs more in the woodland, forest and riparian communities, is also a threat to the ecosystem. Rush skeleton weed has only become common in this region in the last few years. The rapid increase of this species is of particular concern.

Timber Resources

The Cronan Ranch does not contain significant amounts of commercial-grade timber.

Wildlife

Wildlife within the river corridor is typical of wildlife throughout the lower foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Because of the mix of habitat types, the area supports significantly diverse wildlife populations. Over 200 species of birds may occur seasonally, or as residents, including wintering bald eagles. At least 40 species of mammals are residents,

including mountain lions, bobcats, foxes, coyotes, deer, and ring-tail cats. The river itself supports rainbow and brown trout, and a variety of native fishes.

Cultural Resources

A comprehensive cultural inventory, completed in 2005, identified numerous historic and prehistoric era cultural resources. The majority of historic and pre-historic sites are located adjacent to the South Fork, and relate to the Gold Rush era, or to American Indian occupation and food processing sites. The original Gold Rush era activity wiped out many of the aboriginal sites within the river corridor, and post-Gold Rush era mining, ranching, and farming, along with periodic natural floods greatly impacted the historic Gold Rush sites of the 1840's, 50's, and 60's. While several of these sites have lost their integrity, others may still meet National Register of Historic Places criteria. Cultural resources are an important factor to consider in evaluating potential planning impacts.

Grazing

Grazing ceased on the Cronan Ranch when it was purchased by the American River Conservancy. The conditions of sale to the BLM contained the stipulation that there would no longer be any grazing on the property.

Mineral Potential and Mining

Much of the planning area was intensively prospected, and ground-sluiced along the river beginning in 1848, and continuing through the 1850's. Evidence of this mining activity consists of piles of cobbles and gravels, water ditches and prospect pits. Much of the South Fork American Planning Area, including the Cronan Ranch, is within the historic Coloma Mining District. Coloma is famous as the site of Sutter's Mill, where placer gold was first found by James Marshall in January, 1848. By the mid-1850s, the rich surface and river placers became largely exhausted. Gold was also produced from this district in the 1930's and '40s when the South Fork American River channel was dredged in some areas. There has been no significant commercial gold development activity on or in the vicinity of the subject lands in the last 50 years, only minor suction dredging operations.

According to the mineral reports prepared for past management actions in the planning area, the subject lands have a moderate to high potential for the occurrence of lode and placer gold deposits and construction aggregate materials but they have no to low mineral development potential. Detailed information on the mineral resources are contained in the *Mineral Potential Assessment of Public Lands Selected for Withdrawal along the South Fork of the American River*

Wildfire

The planning area contains terrain heavily laden with built-up fuels, including light, flashy grasses. In response to long-standing public concern, wildfires have been vigorously suppressed for decades for public safety, protection of property, and to reduce

catastrophic fire effects on the environment. Exclusion of fire over the years has resulted in increased fuel loading to levels that could potentially enable a wildfire to burn with such intensity that large areas could be severely impacted, and make fire control extremely difficult.

Land Tenure/Ownership

The Cronan Ranch is adjacent to two public land parcels; Greenwood Creek to the east, and the Norton Ravine parcel to the west. Private lands are along the northern boundary. The southern boundary of the Cronan Ranch is the river itself, with private property on the south bank.

The parcel was first privately owned by the Central Pacific Railroad, which acquired the property through a Federal land patent in 1887. It was later owned by Michael Cronan, who purchased the property from Central Pacific in 1891. In 1945, it became part of the Bacchi Ranch in Coloma, begun by Gold Rusher William Bacchi in 1856. The American River Conservancy purchased the property from the Bacchi family in 2004, and conveyed ownership back to the Federal Government in 2005.

Visual Resources

The Cronan Ranch has not been analyzed with respect to the BLM's Visual Resource Management Program. In the community-based planning meetings, however, the participating public expressed a wish to manage all BLM parcels within the South Fork Planning Area, with some limited exceptions, as Visual Class 2, including the Cronan Ranch.

Recreation

Similar to most outdoor areas, the South Fork American River and adjacent lands have provided opportunities for a wide variety of outdoor activities over the years. These activities include water-related recreation, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, gold panning, bicycling, and camping, among others.

Hobby prospecting – the recreational search for gold – has a special significance along the South Fork American because of the river's role in the Gold Rush of 1849. Much of this activity takes place in the river itself, but several tributaries were also historically good sources of placer gold. These days, serious prospectors make use of suction dredges to gain access to the deeper portions of the river where early miners could not go.

In more recent times, the South Fork American River has become one of the most heavily used rivers in the U.S. for white water rafting and kayaking. About 25 years ago, commercial white water rafting began to increase in popularity along the South Fork. It continued to increase until the mid-1990's when it peaked, and then dropped off slightly.

The South Fork offers outstanding opportunities for white water recreation because of its

proximity to major population centers, and year-round flows. It has become one of the nation's most popular rivers for a number of reasons, including short shuttles between access points, several trip options, high spring flows, and dependable boating flows during the summer months when other rivers have dropped too low. These factors combine to create a recreational resource well suited to beginning and intermediate boaters. The South Fork offers a wide variety of experiences, from pastoral to highly social. Depending on time of day or day of week; the same runs provide a wide range of experience, in response to water release and flow patterns. This range of opportunities is only limited by the knowledge and flexibility of river users, and by public access.

With the permission of the former property owners, whitewater rafting companies used the beaches along the river on the Cronan Ranch as a lunch stop and for occasional overnight camping site prior to purchase by the ARC. Semi-permanent facilities were constructed for this purpose.

The Cronan Ranch contains approximately twelve miles of trails, which provide non-motorized public access to the river and other areas within the parcel.

Analysis of the Proposed Action

The Cronan Ranch lies well within the South Fork American River Planning Area and is covered by the General Management Principles contained in the *South Fork American River Management Plan*, adopted in 2004. Those principles were analyzed in an Environmental Assessment, CA-180-03-25, made available to the public for a 45-day comment period beginning in March, 2003, and on file in the Folsom Field Office.

The analysis of the Proposed Action consists of each action item in the Cronan Ranch Management Plan with appropriate comments and analysis.

In this section, each plan component is analyzed. For ease of reading, the plan components are printed in *italics*, while the discussion is in regular print. Some plan components were changed by BLM staff during their review of the document.

Overall, a deliberate attempt was made during the community-based planning process to produce a management plan for the Cronan Ranch that was similar to, and compatible with the existing South Fork plan.

Vision Statement

Management Actions:

The Cronan Ranch will be managed to preserve open space for public use and to restore and enhance plant and wildlife habitats. Reasonable public access to the river and the land will accommodate a wide range of uses including but not limited to recreational and educational experiences that are consistent with resource protection. Public land management will respect and protect private property rights, and balance competing uses. Education will be an important aspect of public land management. Cultural

resources, including both prehistoric and historic, will be protected and enhanced. The Cronan Ranch will be managed in a fashion that recognizes human needs through a partnership with the BLM, El Dorado County, the community, and other relevant agencies.

Analysis:

The vision statement for the Cronan Ranch is very similar to vision statements for other public land parcels along the river. It was developed in the public forum provided by the community-based planning process. Many of the planning participants had also participated in the earlier series of public meetings, so they were familiar with both the process and the product. The Cronan Ranch vision statement is consistent with the SFARMP.

Biodiversity

Management Actions:

Biodiversity is defined as the full variety of life and its associated patterns and processes. It includes the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences between them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur. From a practical perspective, in general, the more diverse an ecosystem, the more stable it is. For the South Fork American, this means that a mosaic of all habitat types common to the area and typical of this elevation in the Western Sierra Nevada will be encouraged and maintained. This will include a variety of plant communities in different stages of succession.

1. *Develop vegetative management plan for the Cronan Ranch.*
2. *Encourage shade areas with native trees, such as oaks, pines, and willows. Balance management for the different species of plants and animals with consideration for various stages of succession. Do not favor one over the other. Emphasize and encourage ecotones.*
3. *Maintain and manage for scenic vistas.*

Analysis:

As stated in the Management Plan, biodiversity is the key to a stable ecosystem: the more diverse a system, the greater the stability. Systems dependent on a single factor, or only a few factors, are in deep trouble if anything happens to that factor. Diverse systems can often handle the failure of single components without the entire system being adversely affected.

The three management actions are intended to maintain biodiversity. Projects based on these management actions will be subjected to further environmental review as projects designed to implement them are proposed.

A vegetative management plan is required on all public land parcels along the South Fork American River. Management of open areas and wooded areas will be addressed in the vegetative management plan. An environmental analysis will be produced for that document.

Currently, vegetation on the Cronan Ranch away from the river riparian communities consists mostly of open grasslands (scenic vistas) and savannah, interspersed with wooded areas – trees and chaparral. The pattern of vegetation is most likely a reflection of management activities during the years as a cattle ranch, wildfire, and soil types.

The encouragement of native shade trees at points along the trails will provide a welcome visual and physical relief for trail users on hot days. Careful placement of shade trees will maintain the scenic vistas. The planting of native trees may have the additional benefit of reducing noxious weeds since their number is often reduced within a tree's drip line.

Management of scenic vistas is covered under Visual Resources Management.

Riparian Communities

Management Actions:

Riparian, or streamside, plant communities are ecologically very important. They are productive for wildlife, and help prevent erosion. All identified riparian communities will be managed to maintain, or enhance as necessary, water quality and biological productivity. This will include perennial and intermittent streams as well as other wetlands. Riparian communities associated with artificial ponds on public lands will also be maintained.

Analysis:

As stated in the plan, riparian areas are very productive biologically. Maintenance, and possible enhancement, of riparian areas will greatly further the goal of sustaining biodiversity. It is BLM policy to protect riparian communities.

Approximately four percent of the vegetation on the Cronan Ranch is classified as riparian. Most of this is along the river, but some exists in other parts of the ranch, associated with stream beds, or areas with a very high water table.

To encourage riparian communities, the BLM will consolidate the areas utilized by holders of commercial permits to provide for higher productivity outside the high use areas along the river. Leveling or otherwise modifying the landscape will not occur near the river on an annual basis as has happened in the past.

Threatened or Endangered Species

Management Actions:

By law, all plants or animals identified as Threatened or Endangered by the Federal Government, or as Rare or Endangered by the State of California, will be given special preference for protection and management. Species which are candidates for listing by either the Federal or State governments will also be given special attention.

Analysis:

Special preference for protection and management of plant or animal species listed by either the federal or state government is a legal obligation for all BLM offices.

The only known federally-listed species which may be observed at the Cronan Ranch is the bald eagle, listed as threatened by the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service. Federal species of concern include the western pond turtle, northern goshawk, California spotted owl, western mastiff bat, Townsend's big ear bat, and the foothill yellow-legged frog. The State of California has identified the willow flycatcher and peregrine falcon as endangered, and also considers the foothill yellow-legged frog a species of special concern.

Management actions which could have an impact on any of these species will be subject to further environmental review.

Noxious Weed Control

Management Actions:

It is the policy of the BLM to eradicate populations of noxious weeds. Each parcel along the South Fork American River shall have a Noxious Weed Control Plan to expedite this policy. The principle weeds along the South Fork include scotch broom, medusahead, and star thistle. Consider all methods of weed abatement.

1. Priority will be given to keeping trails open and usable.
2. Remove star thistle and poison oak five feet on each side of trails where practical.

Analysis:

The control of noxious weeds was identified as a management concern and priority for all planning units. Some of the more common weeds found on the Cronan Ranch and adjacent areas include:

Klamathweed

Yellow Star Thistle

Tree-of-Heaven

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Medusa head | Puncture vine | Himalayan Blackberry |
| French Broom | Scotch Broom | Rush Skeleton weed |
| Bull Thistle | Barbed Goat grass | |

Presently, weed abatement programs within these areas has been completed in a number of ways. Primarily, weed control has been by mechanical means, such as mowing, hand pulling, weed wrenching, and the use of “weed eater” type string cutters. Other options could include the use of prescribed fire, grazing, and the introduction of biological vectors (insects). Presently, chemical control methods are not being used by the Folsom Field Office.

Impacts relating to the control of noxious weeds have resulted in some minor surface disturbance from uprooting plants and some barren appearing areas.

Requirements that management projects use weed-free dirt fill, or sand and gravels may add to the cost of some projects. Requiring that construction equipment be cleaned before entering these areas to thwart the spread of weeds from work project to work project, may also add minor cost to project work. BLM policy now requires that weed-free straw be used on all construction projects.

Future developments and increased access to newly acquired lands may accelerate the spread of noxious weeds. These unwanted species are spread by vehicle use, and tend to invade newly disturbed areas, such as roads, dirt parking areas, trails, and areas impacted by wildfires. In the future, vehicle access may be restricted if weeds are continually being introduced to previously uninfested areas through vehicle use.

The introduction of equestrian use may also increase the spread of some non-native species. Requiring the use of weed-free feed on public lands may assist, somewhat, in reducing the spread of weeds from equestrian use.

Oak Woodlands

Management Actions:

Oaks are very important for influencing vegetation growth patterns and for wildlife. It is the policy of the BLM to encourage, expand, and maintain oak woodlands.

Analysis:

Implementation will be consistent with the effort to maintain biodiversity, and will be a topic covered in the vegetation plan, subject to further environmental review. It has been documented that noxious weeds are absent in the understory associated with oak woodlands.

Access and Vehicle Use

Management Actions:

1. *Vehicle access to the Cronan Ranch by recreational visitors shall normally be confined to the parking lot.*
2. *The Cronan Ranch is closed to the private, unauthorized use of motorized vehicles outside the parking lot.*
3. *Persons who are exempt from these rules include: Federal, State, or local officers or employees in the scope of their duties; and members of any organized rescue or fire-fighting force in performance of an official duty; and persons, as specified in other sections of this plan, who have obtained proper authorization from the BLM.*

Analysis:

These decisions will close the Cronan Ranch to casual motorized vehicle use by the general public. They were made because the planning group felt that vehicle use of designated roadways could impact the visual quality of the areas, diminish the recreation experience of other people, damage vegetation and stream/river banks, damage cultural resources, harm wildlife and wildlife habitat, add to the fire risk, increase erosion and potentially damage other sensitive resources.

Changing outdoor recreation interests, the popularity of four wheel drive Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV's), and litigation over off-road vehicle (ORV) management and use, have all added to the complexity of managing ORV's. While this is a legitimate activity on public lands, it is not a compatible use on the Cronan Ranch. The use of vehicles raises the strong possibility of conflicts with other management objectives. Other recreational users often object to vehicle noise, dust, and speed as impairments to their recreational experience. Equestrians in particular worry about their horses being spooked by a rapidly-moving, noisy vehicle.

Protection of natural and cultural values, wildfire concerns, private property rights and a wish for a natural recreation setting were all factors considered in developing a "closed to ORVs" designation.

Administrative, search and rescue, emergency, and permitted vehicle users will be limited to designated roads and trails.

Commercial Permits

Management Actions:

1. *Commercial permits will be issued on an annual basis. The BLM shall set a daily use capacity for commercial activity, and, if necessary, will adjust levels of commercial use to*

reduce environmental impacts. Adjustments will be made, based on monitoring, using adaptive management.

- 2. The number of commercial permits and users shall be adequate to meet public demand without adverse social and environmental impacts. If necessary, the BLM will reduce the number of permits issued on the Cronan Ranch by not allowing companies to transfer their use of the property when their companies are sold to another party.*
- 3. The BLM will monitor commercial use and adjust the number of permits and/or use as needed, based on monitoring and carrying capacity thresholds.*
- 4. Commercial outfitter sites shall be grouped together in Permittee Zone. No existing commercial outfitter will be assigned a permanent commercial camp location. Camp location will be rotated on an annual basis. Shade structures will be allowed for food preparation. Picnic tables will be allowed, but will be phased out within five years. All temporary structures will be removed by October 1 each year.*
- 5. Portable toilet facilities shall be phased out and replaced with permanent facilities*
- 6. From July First until Labor Day, commercial outfitters must have six or more boats on the river to qualify for having a vehicle come in to provide support for lunching purposes.*
- 7. Commercial kayakers will be allowed to take-out, but not put-in on the Cronan Ranch*
- 8. On a case-by-case basis, the BLM may authorize a put-in/take-out request by a permitted Cronan Ranch outfitter. Decisions will be consistent with overall vision of the property. .*

Analysis:

During staff review of recommendations from the public on commercial use, a number of changes were suggested. These changes were based on experience in managing whitewater recreation on the South Fork, and are consistent with the SFARMP. The intent is to balance commercial and recreational needs with protection of the environment.

All commercial activities on public land require a permit from the BLM. This includes commercial whitewater companies that use public lands for lunch and restroom stops, and for camping. (Permits that allow commercial use of the river itself are issued by El Dorado County.) The Cronan Ranch is a popular lunch stop, located on the river just before the river enters a steep-sided gorge. The companies have been using the Cronan Ranch for some time, originally obtaining permission from the Ranch's private owners. Continuing this practice does not generate new resource impacts, however, it may contribute to the cumulative impacts of people on the riparian ecosystem.

Commercial permits are proposed to be issued on an annual basis. This will allow the BLM to review data from the monitoring program, and make any needed adjustments to protect the environment or to reduce conflicts between commercial operators. The commercial operators would likely prefer a multi-year permit for stability, however, the BLM's need to correct and avoid adverse environmental impacts takes precedence.

The monitoring program is mandated by the SFARMP for all public lands along the South Fork, including parcels acquired by the BLM after the SFARMP was adopted. BLM specialists are already gathering resource data. Monitoring will reveal if visitor activity, including commercial use, is having an impact on the environment of the Cronan Ranch. If so, the BLM will use the adaptive management technique to resolve the issue. This technique consists of using the least restrictive solution first; if that doesn't work, then trying a more restrictive solution until the issue is resolved.

Monitoring will enable the BLM to establish baseline resource data, and to identify changes. This information is critical to forming carrying capacity standards and thresholds.

Commercial whitewater operators will be restricted to a permittee zone. This is the stretch of river shoreline easily accessible by road. Permit holders will be allowed to place temporary facilities at designated sites in this area. This is not a new use of the area since the previous property owner allowed the companies the same privilege.

Currently, the whitewater companies with sites on the Cronan Ranch have portable restrooms on the property for use by clients. These will be replaced by permanent facilities by the BLM. Permanent toilet facilities will be much easier and less expensive to maintain than the temporaries, and will be more compatible with environmental goals. Construction of permanent toilets will involve noise and dust during construction, and use of the access road for construction vehicles and other equipment.

Use of the Cronan Ranch Road by commercial operators to support their operations will be restricted during the heavy recreation use season (July 1 to August 30). As mentioned earlier, the participants in the public planning process were concerned about vehicle use, and expressed a desire to keep it minimal. For this reason, commercial operators with six or more boats in their group will be allowed the use of a support vehicle to carry sufficient supplies during the heavy use season. This opportunity allows the operators to set up and break down lunch in a timely fashion. It potentially reduces the chance of supplies going into the river from boating mishaps. Operators with fewer clients are better able to carry what they need on the rafts. This will reduce the amount of vehicle traffic, thus reducing dust and potential conflict with trail users. By limiting the season of vehicular use to July 1 to August 30, conflicts between trail users and boaters will be significantly reduced.

Several commercial kayak schools use the Cronan Ranch as a take-out to remove their students and their kayaks from the river. This requires the use of a vehicle to transport the kayaks from the property. This would involve perhaps dozens of student kayak trips during the season. Compared to commercial rafting, commercial kayaking is a very limited activity on the South Fork.

To the kayak schools, the Cronan Ranch is an ideal place to take-out. Just downstream from the Cronan Ranch, the South Fork enters the Gorge, which can be quite dangerous

to people inexperienced in running rivers. Upstream are numerous opportunities to learn the use of a kayak in relatively calm waters.

Permission for the use of vehicles to transport kayaks from the river through the Cronan Ranch will be part of their permits, along with stipulations to reduce environmental impacts. Those impacts would include dust and vehicle noise several times during the season. A 15 mph speed limit will be enforced on the access road.

The draft plan contains a provision for other commercial operators with BLM permits to want to use the Cronan Ranch for put-in/take-out purposes. It would require the operator to make a special request to the BLM for permission to do so. These will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The major impact anticipated from these requests will be additional vehicle use of the Cronan Ranch Road, increasing dust and noise along with the potential for conflict with other recreationists.

Special Events/Competitive Events/Organized Groups

Management Actions:

- 1. On a case-by-case basis, and consistent with the overall vision statement, the BLM may issue Special Use Permits (SUPs) for one-time special events, competitive events, or organized group use of the Cronan Ranch.*

Analysis:

The decision to continue issuing SUP's creates no new impacts; it is part of BLM policy, and relates to everyday business. These decisions create no immediate, direct impacts, but could lead to future impacts. As part of each project's analysis, a specific EA will be completed to address potential impacts associated with the proposals and their implementation.

Film Permit Proposals

Management Actions:

- 1. Film permit proposals will be made on a case-by-case basis consistent with the overall vision of the property.*
- 2. Monitor all commercial filming activities closely.*
- 3. Pre-prepare a standard Environmental Analysis for commercial filming at the Cronan Ranch that identifies appropriate sites, areas where filming is inappropriate, and mitigation measures.*

- 4. Work with local film commission to help implement a professional film permitting program in conjunction with local government and integrate environmental review into the planning process*

Analysis:

Commercial filming, for advertising purposes, television shows, or full-length movies, is considered an important use of public lands. Many local governments in California, including El Dorado County, have a filming liaison office to facilitate on-location movie-making. Filming on public lands requires a permit from the BLM. Filming has occurred in the past on the Cronan Ranch.

A standard Environmental Analysis for commercial filming on the Cronan Ranch will identify areas where filming could take place, and list possible impacts in a generic sense. The standard EA will be developed in conjunction with the County Film Commission. Each proposal will also receive a specific analysis that will be a supplement to the standard document. The specific analysis will take into account any unique aspects of the filming proposal, and propose specific stipulations designed to mitigate adverse impacts

There are several problems inherent with commercial filming. First, the public is excluded from the filming site. Often, filming companies have very expensive equipment that is left on site, and needs to be kept secure. The companies certainly don't want public land users wandering into the area where filming is taking place and perhaps ruining their desired imagery.

Second, filming companies have a mixed record with respect to the environment. The BLM's goal for filming companies is for them to leave no trace of their activity. Stipulations for the use of motorized vehicles must be formulated for each project, and strictly adhered to. This, in turn, requires close monitoring to ensure the filming company remains in compliance with all the stipulations attached to their permits. If a filming company doesn't comply with the stipulations listed on their permit, a cease and desist order will be issued.

Potential impacts can be partially mitigated by requiring film companies to submit their permit requests well in advance to allow the BLM sufficient time to adequately analyze the proposal, and to provide a 30-day public comment period.

Recreational Gold Dredging

Management Actions:

- 1. Recreational Dredging Permits will be allowed on a case-by-case basis consistent with the guidelines contained in the SFARMP (2004), with the overall vision of the property, and with the current stipulations of BLM dredging permits.*
- 2. Recreational dredging may be allowed in the public use zones along the river, but not in the Permittee Zone used by commercial operators.*

3. Permits shall be for a two-week period at a specific site, with no more than two dredges operating at the same time on the Cronan Ranch.

4. Vehicle access for dredgers will be limited – one time in; one time out.

Analysis:

As stipulated in the SFARMP, the use of motorized devices for the recreational collection of minerals will be authorized through the issuance of a dredging permit, available from the Folsom Field Office. The number of dredge users and the locations available for dredging will be self-regulating, with a minimum of 200 foot spacing between dredgers, unless shorter distances are agreed upon among dredgers at the dredging site. Dredge engines will be four-stroke engines only. The use of two stroke engines will not be allowed. All dredges must have appropriate spark arresting mufflers. Dredging will only be allowed from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm, starting the last weekend in May through October 15. All dredgers must have an original California Fish and Game dredging permit in their possession when they are dredging on the river. The BLM will use Adaptive Management to address conflicts, and to manage this program to minimize potential impacts.

These stipulations were designed to reduce conflicts with boaters to ensure both sets of recreational users had an opportunity to use the river for their activity.

Visual Resource Management

Management Actions:

1. Manage all lands in the Cronan Ranch parcel as VRM Class II

Analysis:

The VRM Class II pertains to “Changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color and texture) caused by management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. Contrasts are seen, but must not attract attention.”

The Folsom Field Office has not completed a field office-wide Visual Resource Inventory. Therefore, no VRM classes have been assigned other than those relating to special area policy management (Class I for Wild & Scenic, WSA’s). These classes are normally assigned during the land use planning process. The VRM goals and objectives contained in this plan will be reviewed once VRM management classes are assigned to the field office during the upcoming land use plan revision.

Scenic vistas are important to the overall landscape of the Cronan Ranch. It is different than on most other South Fork parcels because the canyon opens up on the Cronan Ranch, giving the public a chance to see scenic river and valley vistas with a mix of vegetative types. Public can have a variety of experiences by choosing the ecotones that

want to hike, bike, or ride.

Camping

Management Actions:

1. *Organized group camping will require a Special Recreation Use Permit.*
2. *Camping for commercial operators will remain unchanged from present. Operators must notify BLM for overnight use. Commercial operators may use vehicular access to support camping activities.*
3. *Allow general public camping with Special Use Permits*
4. *Locate camping zones in fire-safe areas.*
5. *The BLM will identify additional fire-safe areas for camping.*
6. *Locate seasonal campsites for use when fire danger is minimal.*
7. *Campsites will be accessible only by non-motorized transportation.*

Analysis:

This decision would close the Cronan Ranch to casual-use camping. Overnight camping would be authorized through a camping permit system, or by means of a Special Recreation Permit. The planning group felt that restrictions on camping are needed because of wildfire potential, needed allocation of camping spots between different recreation users, visual impacts from campers, and for sanitary and health concerns.

Camping would be accommodated in areas identified for camping and other recreational uses. These areas will not be specific camping sites, but rather “zones” where campers can pick out their own locations and set up a camp. An environmental analysis will be required prior to the designation of a site as a camping zone. Camping along the river would be restricted to an area within 250 feet of the river’s edge, to areas which minimize environmental impacts, and to areas where campfire use would be restricted to fire safe areas or facilities. A camping fee will provide funds to the BLM to maintain and manage this use. The fee system will be by self-registration at a registration/information sites.

Focusing use into specific areas will also assist in maintenance and litter cleanup efforts. Instituting camping fees will provide funds back to this area to assist in maintaining the area, such as toilet pumping, trash removal, trail maintenance, law enforcement, etc.

By limiting access to camping sites to non-motorized transportation, impacts associated with sustained motor vehicle use, such as vegetation loss, soil loss and accelerated erosion, and ruts, will be avoided.

Demand for camping is expected to be small. During the summer, the Cronan Ranch can be very warm, and an hour's more driving will take a prospective camper well into the higher elevations of the Sierra where it is noticeably cooler. In the fall and winter, it is cool and wet – not what most campers want to experience.

Campfires

Management Actions:

- 1. Campfires are allowed only in BLM- provided fire-rings located within designated campsites, or in camping zones.*

Analysis:

The decision closes the Cronan Ranch to casual campfire use, and requires special permits in addition to the standard California Campfire Permit. For fires associated with camping, the required camping permit will act as a special fire permit. Special Recreation Permits may also be an instrument for providing the needed authorization to construct fires.

This decision will require the public to first acquire a special fire permit or camping permit before camping or building fires on public lands in these planning units. This will take some of the spontaneity out of recreating on the public lands. Tighter control of campfires may reduce the threat of wildfire ignitions. With the use of permits, reported sightings of smoke or fire may be identified as permitted uses and not have to be investigated.

At the public planning meetings, wildfire ignition by public land campers was a universal concern. Presently, camping and campfires are allowed anywhere within this planning area. By limiting campfires to fire safe sites or facilities, the potential for wildfire starts from campfires would be greatly reduced. A camping permit would also provide a means to inform the public of current fire restrictions, and the proper preparation and extinguishing of campfires.

Cultural Resources

Management Actions:

- 1. Where practical, cultural sites will be interpreted for public use and enjoyment with an emphasis on interpreting sites associated with the Gold Rush of 1849, on the Cronan Ranch.*
- 2. Decision on retaining cultural resources does not preclude the removal of extraneous barbed wire.*

Analysis:

BLM is required by law to protect cultural resources found on the public lands. This decision is already being implemented, and will not generate new actions or changes in resource conditions or generate any impacts to the natural or social environment. Other actions relating to this plan may affect cultural resources. These potential impacts will be addressed under site-specific Environmental Assessments normally conducted for such projects as building trails, installing restrooms, designating camping zones, or when other surface disturbing activities are planned. As part of these assessments, the BLM will comply fully with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Interpretation has been defined as the art of working towards an understanding awareness of a resource rather than just relating facts. The California Gold Rush of 1849 has been described by some historians as the greatest non-military adventure in American history, and continues to fascinate people to this day. The lands of the Cronan Ranch were certainly involved with the Gold Rush, and it is possible that some sites remain.

The Cronan Ranch contains barbed wire fences installed by previous owners to control livestock grazing. Since the property is no longer used for grazing, the fences are unnecessary, and constitute a visual intrusion as well as a possible impediment to recreational use. It is quite possible, however, that some of the fencing could be of an age to be subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This would require a qualified archaeologist to be involved in any fence removal project.

Rights-of-Way

Management Actions:

1. *The same rules for rights-of-way (ROW) stated in the SFA Management Plan shall also apply to the Cronan Ranch.*

Analysis:

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) Title 5, provides provisions for the issuance of Rights-of-ways (ROW). The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 43 Part 2800 provides policy on issuing ROWs, which includes “preventing unnecessary or undue environmental damage to lands and resources” and “Protect the natural resources associated with public lands and adjacent private lands”. These provisions already provide protective measures mirrored somewhat in the above planning decision.

Presently the majority of existing ROWs are located adjacent to the Highway 49 corridor. These include State Highway 49 itself, power and utility lines, and underground pipelines. In the reasonable future the most likely request for additional ROWs would occur along Highway 49. These would most likely relate to requests to widen or alter Highway 49, and the upgrade or new installation of additional utility lines. These activities would most likely take place within the highway ROW (which is already

developed) and maintained to reduce bush and vegetation for highway visibility. The small number of anticipated future ROWs is unlikely to present any major impacts to the goal of maintaining the area's *Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II* integrity. The VRM Class II pertains to "Changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color and texture) caused by management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. Contrasts are seen, but must not attract attention." Project mitigation measures such as painting, project location/placement, redesign, and vegetative screening can all be used to lessen impacts. It is not anticipated that, in the foreseeable future, any projects would be proposed that would conflict with this management decision. All proposed ROWs require specific NEPA analysis.

Trails

Management Actions:

1. *The trails on the Cronan Ranch will be multi use trails maintained to a minimum of five feet in width where possible. The long term goal of a trail system from Greenwood Creek to Salmon Falls will continue to be vigorously pursued. Trails from private property on to the Cronan Ranch will be handled on a case by case basis. The trails will be open all year; a trail monitoring plan will be developed to insure the integrity of the system is maintained. Temporary closures of certain trails may be necessary from time to time to prevent resource damage and overuse.*
2. *Encourage trail design consistent with accepted Best Management Practices (BMP) and professional design.*
3. *Maintenance of existing trails is higher priority than designing and constructing new trails. Expand trail system where possible or desirable with BMP.*
4. *To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, bicyclists and equestrians will be asked to stay on the trails at all times.*

Analysis:

Approximately 12 miles of trails current exist on the Cronan Ranch, and are currently in use by the public.

Site-specific trail construction and maintenance impacts will be addressed under a project EA. Impacts to sensitive cultural and natural resources would be avoided or minimized.

Many species of noxious weed have evolved seed distribution strategies that involve the seed somehow sticking to a passing animal for transport to a new growing site. By confining bicyclists and equestrians to the trails themselves, weed seeds will be much slower to spread. If an individual wishes to leave the trail, doing so on foot is not as likely to spread seeds.

Dispersed use, coupled with an increase in use of developed trails, could lead to an increase in trailside litter.

Facilities

Management Actions:

1. *Develop non-potable water source at the trailhead with hose bib.*
2. *Develop or designate helicopter Landing Zone.*
3. *Provide picnic facilities at staging area*
4. *Provide permanent restroom facilities at the parking lot, and locations near the public beach sites.*

Analysis:

The development of a non-potable water source at the trailhead will need a feasibility study to determine if a water supply can be found in the vicinity of the trailhead, and, if so, how best to make it available for use. A project environmental assessment would be required before a water supply is developed.

The same is true of a helicopter landing zone. An environmental assessment will be needed before a site could be designated or developed.

The public discussion on picnic facilities at the staging area was clear in that the public participants in planning want the existing facilities replaced and upgraded. Again, a project EA would be required.

The construction of permanent restroom facilities would involve short-term impacts, including noise and dust, associated with construction, however, the long-term effect would be the avoidance of sanitation problems and enhancement of the recreation experience.

Permanent restrooms would require periodic maintenance, which would involve vehicle use. The existing restrooms already have to be serviced by vehicle, so this would not be a new impact, but would continue to add to the on-going cumulative impact.

Recreational Use of Firearms

Management Actions:

1. *Target shooting is prohibited on the Cronan Ranch.*

Analysis:

In the public meetings, discussions on target shooting were lively with a great number of people having their say, but no consensus was reached.

The BLM did its own analysis, including review of the public debate, and determined that target shooting was not a compatible use on the Cronan Ranch.

The decision was based on several factors. The public felt that target shooting was unsafe because of the close vicinity of roads, highways, private homes, boater traffic on the river, trail users including equestrians and mountain bikers, and other recreationists. Target shooting was also felt to aggravate vandalism and littering, as well as increase the possibility of a wildfire. It is also incompatible with the purpose of protecting and enhancing plant and wildlife habitat. BLM experience in other areas has been that an unacceptable number of target shooters do not practice good firearms safety, thus endangering other people who may be nearby.

Target shooting is a casual use activity, often by local residents. The closure of the South Fork Planning Area, including the Cronan Ranch, to shooting still leaves numerous other close-by BLM parcels open for this type of activity. Several rifle ranges, including the Eldorado Rod and Gun Club on Union Mine Road, are not far away. This use can easily be displaced to other locations, and no impacts to users are anticipated.

The closure will benefit home owners who live close to areas where target shooting is taking place, benefits the safety of recreational visitors and reduces wildfire concerns. Vandalism and litter buildup may drop in the closed area, but may be displaced to other public and private lands.

This decision will have no effect on hunting activities.

Hunting

Plan Text:

- 1. Hunting is restricted to deer during the general season, turkey in the fall season, quail, and mourning doves, during the seasons specified by the CA Department of Fish and Game. There will be no hunting for bear, squirrels, rabbits, jackrabbits, waterfowl, furbearers, or non-game species. Information on hunting seasons will be posted on the information kiosk in the staging area of the parking lot.*
- 2. Hunters will sign in at the kiosk to inform other users they are hunting that particular day.*

Analysis:

Hunting would not be a new use of the Cronan Ranch. It was allowed by the private owners prior to acquisition by the American River Conservancy and the BLM.

During the public planning process, hunting on the Cronan Ranch proved quite controversial, with pros and cons presented with a great deal of passion. Planning participants, however, were not able to reach consensus on the topic.

The primary argument against hunting was safety. People who wanted to hike or ride the trails did not like the thought of hunters in the area, and spoke of their experiences with near misses. Other arguments against hunting had to do with protection of wildlife. The increase in recreational trail use in an area also used by hunters, however, presents a very real safety problem. A bullet from a high-powered rifle, the sort used to hunt deer, is capable of inflicting serious damage at a distance of well over a mile. Bullets can ricochet off rocks or other objects in unpredictable directions. The shotguns used for hunting turkeys and other game birds aren't as potentially threatening since birdshot loses velocity quickly and doesn't travel very far.

Hunting organizations are quick to point out that the accident rate associated with hunting is low. This is true – statistics available from the California Department of Fish & Game and other sources verify it. Nonetheless, accidents sometimes happen.

The proposed action would allow limited hunting to continue on the Cronan Ranch. Under the draft plan, hunting would be permitted only in the fall and winter, a time when overall recreation use is not as intense as in the spring and summer.

Huntable game species would include only deer, turkeys, quail, and mourning doves. Hunters would not be able to pursue bears, other species of upland game, furbearers or predators because of the length of the allowable hunting seasons is too long, and would conflict with other recreational users.

In the 2006 booklet on hunting regulations, the CA Department of Fish and Game specifies that general deer season is from September 23 until October 29, a period of about a month. During this time, non-hunters visiting the Cronan Ranch may feel threatened by the presence of hunters. This can be mitigated by the non-hunters using an alternative site where hunting is not allowed, several of which are in the local area.

The Cronan Ranch will not be available for early deer season, August 19 until September 10, because hunting would occur during the heavy use season, especially the Labor Day weekend. Hunting with a blackpowder weapon on the Cronan Ranch is a bad idea because of the inherent fire hazard.

There are two seasons for turkey hunting. The spring season runs from March 25 until April 30, a bit more than a month. The fall season is from November 12 to November

27. The proposed action is to allow turkey hunting during the fall season, but not the spring. This is because of the potential conflict with other recreationists during the spring. In the past few years, fairly large numbers of hikers and equestrians have wanted to use the trails on the Cronan Ranch in the spring to take advantage of the spring weather and to enjoy the wildflower display. It is doubtful if the same number of non-hunters will be on the trails in the cool and often wet time just before the Thanksgiving holiday. With fewer people on the Cronan Ranch in the late fall, the potential for an accidents or other conflict is reduced.

Quail season is from October 15 until January 31, and dove season is in two segments: early season is from September first until the fifteenth, and the late season runs from November 12 to December 26.

To further reduce the possibility of accidents, information on hunting seasons would be posted on the parking lot kiosk to inform trail users that hunters may be in the area. Persons not wishing to use the trails during hunting season would be able to modify their plans based on that information.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires analysis of the “No Action Alternative” in all environmental documents.

Normally, there is a very clear distinction between a proposed action, and the no action alternative -- enough of a distinction to enable a decision-maker to clearly compare the impacts of doing something as opposed to doing nothing.

In the case of the Cronan Ranch, however, the instant BLM accepted the property, it automatically came under the authority of the existing *South Fork American River Management Plan*, and became part of the South Fork American River Special Recreation Area. According to the SFARMP, until such time as a specific plan is written and adopted, all acquired lands are subject to all the General Management Principles listed in the South Fork plan, and will be managed in a fashion similar to the closest BLM parcel.

Since the Proposed Action is the adoption of a specific plan for the Cronan Ranch, and the No Action Alternative consists of the interim management policies of the SFARMP, there is no clear distinction between the two; environmental impacts on the land will be about the same. Under either alternative, a vegetation management plan, a noxious weed plan, and a fuels management plan are required. Vehicles will be confined to designated routes. The property will be withdrawn from the General Mining Law. Rights-of-way will be treated the same. Use of gold dredgers will require a special permit. Commercial users will require a special permit. Special status plant and animal species will continue to receive protection. The BLM will establish carrying capacity standards, and use the principles of Adaptive Management to resolve problems.

Site-specific projects will require further environmental analysis.

Essentially, the primary differences between interim management and the Cronan Ranch Management Plan are associated with rules governing both commercial and casual recreation activities.

Under the No Action Alternative, recreation visitors to the Cronan Ranch would continue to use the property as they had in the past. This could include occasional recreation conflicts, and possibly environmental damage associated with overuse of some sites on the property.

Critical Elements not Present, not Affected, or not Impacted

The following critical elements have been analyzed as per the BLM Manual Handbook H-1790-1 and are either not present or not affected: Air Quality, Environmental Justice, Farm Lands, Flood Plain, Native American Religious Concerns, Wastes -- Hazardous or Solid, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

Cumulative Impacts

No significant cumulative impacts are expected from the proposed action or Alternative One. Under either of the alternatives, public use would increase but management action proposed would place control and restriction on this use which would limit potential impacts. Alternative Two (No Action) could have cumulative impacts in that increased mineral development, unregulated and non-supported recreation use could have the potential, over a long period or time, to potentially impact the human environment.

Mitigation Measures

Planning actions have been designed to reduce potential impacts and have incorporated mitigation measure into the actions. This, plus standard BLM operating procedures, will reduce the need for mitigation measures. Future actions associated with this plan will have specific environmental reviews completed for ground disturbing actions. Mitigation measures will be built into these assessments. Also the principle of adaptive management incorporated into this plan will enable BLM to make changes or adjust future use to mitigate unforeseen resource conflicts, resource damage or user conflicts as they develop.

Consultation and Coordination

Participating Staff:

Deane Swickard
Jim Eicher

BLM Field Manager
BLM South Fork American Planning Lead

| | |
|----------------|---|
| James Barnes | BLM Archeologist |
| Kim Bunn | BLM Wildlife Biologist |
| Tim Carroll | BLM Geologist |
| Lou Cutajar | BLM Public Contact Representative |
| Peggy Cranston | BLM Wildlife Biologist |
| Dean Decker | BLM Archeologist/ROW Specialist |
| Al Franklin | BLM Botanist/Pine Hill Preserve Manager |
| Jeff Horn | BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner |
| John Scull | BLM Community Planner/Public Affairs |
| Sarah Tomich | BLM GIS/ Mapping Support |
| D.C. Carr | BLM River Specialist |

Agencies or Organizations Contacted or Consulted during the planning process:

El Dorado County Planning Department
 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
 El Dorado County Taxpayers Association
 El Dorado County Taxpayers for Quality Growth
 Eldorado National Forest
 U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 California Department of Fish and Game
 American River Conservancy
 Friends of the River
 American Whitewater Affiliation
 Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park
 Bureau of Reclamation

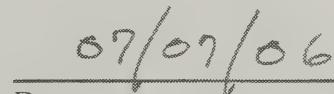
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in this assessment, CA-018-06-26, I have determined that the impacts are not expected to be significant and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Prepared by:

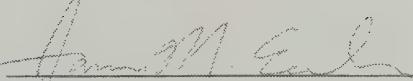


John Scull
Community Planner
Folsom Field Office



Date

Approved by:



James M. Eicher
Acting Field Manager
Folsom Field Office



Date

Cronan Ranch

